

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

All the Year Round

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A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

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CHAPTER XX.

"It's a jolly little place enough!"

"I think it's lovely."

There was a certain tone of regret, of lingering, reluctant farewell, in both voices; though in Julian's case it was light and patronising; in Clemence's, dreamy and tender. As Julian spoke he shifted his position slightly as he leant against the iron railing by which they stood, and let his eyes wander over the scene before them with condescending approval.

They were standing on the somewhat embryonic "sea-front" of what a few years before had been a fishing village, and was now struggling, rather inefficiently, to become a watering-place. Such season as the place could boast was entirely confined to the summer months; to the frequenters of winter resorts it was absolutely unknown; consequently its intrinsic charms at the moment—in all the lassitude and monotony left by departed glory—might have been considered conspicuous by their absence. But it was a glorious winter's day. A slight sprinkling of snow had been frozen on the roofs of the somewhat depressed-looking houses and on the unsightliness of the unfinished sea-front; and brilliant sunshine, almost warm in spite of the keen, frosty air, was glorifying alike the deserted little town, the country beyond, and the sparkling, dancing sea. The frosty, invigorating brightness found a responsive chord

in Julian's heart this morning; he was not always so susceptible to such simple, natural influences. He was in a good humour with the place; he had spent two wholly satisfactory days there—two days, moreover, which had had much the same influence upon his moral tone as a change to bracing air and simple, wholesome food would have on a physique accustomed to dissipation.

His survey ended finally with Clemence's face. She was standing at his side looking out over the sea, her eyes intent and full of feeling, her beautiful face hushed and still, absorbed by the mysterious charm of the ceaseless movement and trouble of the bright water stretching away before her.

"What are you looking at, Clemence?" he said boyishly.

She lifted her eyes to his quite gravely and simply.

"Only the sea," she said. "It is so beautiful, I feel as if I never could leave off looking at it. It makes me feel—oh, I can't tell you, but it is like something great and strong to take away with one!" She looked away again. "Oh, I wish, I wish we need not go!" she said with a little sigh.

"I wish we needn't," returned Julian; he had been dimly conscious of something in her eyes and voice which made her previous words, simple as they seemed, almost unintelligible to him, and he caught at her last sentence as containing an idea to which he could respond. "It's an awful nuisance, isn't it? And do you know it is time we started? Never mind. We'll come down again soon!"

They stood for another moment; Clemence looking out at the sunny sea, Julian taking another careless com-

hensive view of the whole scene ; and then, as though those last looks had contained their respective farewells, they turned with one accord and walked away in the direction of the railway station. And as if in turning her back upon the sunlit sea she had turned her back also upon something less definite and tangible, a certain gravity and wistfulness crept gradually over Clemence's face as they went ; crept over it to settle down into a sadness most unusual to it as the train carried them quickly away towards London. Julian, sitting opposite her, was vaguely struck by her expression.

"Are you awfully sorry to go back, Clemence ?" he said.

She started slightly, and looked at him with a faint smile.

"I suppose I am !" she said. "We have been very happy, haven't we ?" There was a wistful regret in her voice which touched him somehow, and he answered her demonstratively, with a cheery and enthusiastic augury for the future. Clemence smiled again ; again rather faintly. "I know !" she said. "I mean I hope so. Only—I don't know what's the matter with me ! I feel as if—something were finished !"

Julian broke into a boyish laugh. Her depression was by no means displeasing to him ; it was a tribute to his importance, to her dependence on him ; and the necessity for "cheering her up" implied the exercise of that superiority and authority in which he delighted.

"Why, what a dear little goose you are, Clemence !" he said, leaning forward to take her hands in his. "A 'Friday to Monday' can't last for ever, you know, but it can be repeated again and again. Why, I shall be up every day—every single day, I promise you. I shouldn't wonder if I found I could spend the evening with you to-morrow ? Won't that console you ?"

She did not answer him, but she took one of his hands in hers and pressed it to her cheek. His consolation had hardly touched that strange oppression which weighed upon her, and Julian, in high feather, and quite unaware that only his voice was heard by her, his words passing her by unheeded, had been talking at great length about all the happiness before them, when she said, in a hesitating, far-away voice :

"Could you—could you come home with me this afternoon ?"

Julian paused a moment. The question was hardly the response his words had demanded. Then he said decisively :

"Quite impossible, I am sorry to say. I would if I could, you know, dear, but it's quite impossible !"

She gave his hand a little quick pressure.

"I know, of course," she murmured gently. She paused a moment, and then said in a low voice, rather irrelevantly as it seemed : "Julian"—his name still came rather hesitatingly from her lips—"do you think—do you like Mrs. Jackson ?"

Mrs. Jackson was the name of the woman whose rooms Julian had taken for her, and he started slightly at the question.

"She's not a bad sort," he said, with rather startled consideration. "At least, she seems all right. Isn't she nice to you, Clemence ? Don't you like the rooms ?"

"Oh, yes ! yes !" she said quickly, almost as though she reproached herself for saying anything that could suggest to him even a shadow of discontent on her part. "I like them so very, very much. It is only—I don't know what exactly. Somehow, I don't think Mrs. Jackson is quite a nice woman." She had spoken the last words hesitatingly and with difficulty, almost as though they came from her against her will.

Julian glanced at her quickly.

"What makes you think that, Clemence ?" he said, with judicial masterfulness. "Have you any reason, I mean ?"

But Clemence was hardly able to define, even in her own pure mind, what it was that jarred upon her in her landlady's manner ; and to Julian she was utterly unable to put her feelings into words. Her hasty disclaimer and her hesitating beginnings and falterings, however, served to remove the misgiving which had stirred him lest some knowledge of his own real life should have come to the woman's knowledge. He was the reader to let himself be reassured and to dismiss the subject in that the train was slackening speed for the last time before reaching London, and he intended to move into a first-class smoking carriage at the approaching station. Julian was well aware of the risks of discovery involved in these journeys with Clemence ; and though he faced them nonchalantly enough, he used wits with which no one who knew him only in his capacities of man about town and budding barrister would have credited him to reduce them to a minimum. To be seen emerging from a

third-class carriage at Victoria Station was a wholly unnecessary risk to run, and he avoided it accordingly.

" You mustn't be fanciful, Clemmie," he said, now in a lordly and airy fashion. " I've no doubt Mrs. Jackson is a very jolly woman, as a matter of fact. Look here, dear, would you mind if I went and had a smoke now? It isn't much further, you know, and one mustn't smoke in hospital, you see! "

Clemence was very pale when he joined her on the platform at Victoria—joined her after a quick glance round to see whether he must prepare himself for an encounter with an acquaintance; and she did not speak, only looked up at him with a grave, steady smile which made her face sadder than before. His announcement of his intention of putting her into a hansom drew from her an absolutely horrified protest. She would go in an omnibus, she told him hurriedly, or in the underground! She had never been in a cab! It would cost so much! But when he overruled her, a little impatiently—it was not yet dark, and he did not wish to remain longer than was necessary with her in Victoria Station—she submitted timidly, with a sudden slight flushing of her cheeks.

" A four-wheeler, Julian!" she murmured pleadingly, as they emerged into the station yard. With a lofty smile at what he supposed to be nervousness on her part, he signified assent with a little condescending gesture, and stopped before a waiting cab.

" Here you are," he said. " Jump in! "

She got in obediently, and as he shut the door she turned to him through the open window.

" Good-bye, Julian!" she said, in a low, sweet voice.

" Good-bye!" he said cheerily, smiling at her. Her face in its dingy frame looked whiter, sweeter, and more steadfast than ever, and it made a curiously sudden and distinct impression on Julian's mental retina. Then the cab turned lumberingly round, and he moved smartly away. He did not see that as the cab turned, that sweet white face appeared at the other window and followed him with wide, wistful eyes until the moving life of London parted them.

Julian was on his way to the club. He had a vague disinclination to the thought of going home; the house in Chelsea was always more or less distasteful to him now, and he had no intention of going thither

before it was necessary. It was nearly dark by the time his destination was reached, and as his hansom drew up a few yards from the club entrance he could only see that the way was stopped by a carriage from which two ladies and a gentleman had just emerged. It was the younger of the two ladies who glanced in his direction, and said, in a pretty, uninterested voice:

" Isn't that Mr. Romayne? "

Marston Loring was the man addressed, and he shot a keen, considering glance at the speaker—Miss Pomeroy. The fact that her eyes had noticed Julian when his quick ones had not, trivial as it was, was not without its significance to the man whose stock-in-trade, so to speak, was founded on clever estimate and appreciation of trifles. Was Miss Pomeroy not so entirely unobservant a nonentity as she was supposed to be, he asked himself, not for the first time, or was there another reason for her quickness in this instance?

" So it is!" he said. " Hullo, old fellow! "

Julian came eagerly up to the group as it paused for him on the club steps, and shook hands in his pleasantest manner with Mrs. Pomeroy.

" I do believe it's a ladies' afternoon! " he exclaimed gaily. " What luck for me! How do you do? " shaking hands with Miss Pomeroy. " I'd actually forgotten all about it, and I've only just come up from Brighton! Loring, you must ask me to join your party, old man! Tell him so, Miss Pomeroy, please! "

Whether strict veracity is to be imputed to a young man who professes unbounded satisfaction at finding fashionable " ladies' teas" in full swing at his club when he has just come off a journey is perhaps doubtful; but Julian threw himself into the spirit of the moment with a frank gaiety and enthusiasm which was not to be surpassed. The greater number of the ladies who were sipping club tea as if it were a hitherto untasted nectar, and gazing at club furniture as though it were provision for the comfort of some strange animal, were acquaintances of his; and as he moved about among them his passage seemed to be marked by merrier laughs, a quicker fire of the jokes of the moment, and brighter faces than prevailed elsewhere. He was enjoying himself so thoroughly, apparently, that he was unable to tear himself away, and when he left the club at last, he sprang into a hansom,

and told the driver to "put the horse along." He and his mother were dining out together, and he had left himself barely sufficient time to dress.

He ran up the steps, flinging the driver his fare, let himself in with his latchkey, and proceeded to his room up two steps at a time. When he emerged thence, twenty minutes later, in evening dress, he was congratulating himself on having "done the trick capitally, and well up to time."

He was a little surprised, therefore, as he came downstairs, to find his mother's maid waiting for him outside the drawing-room door with the information that Mrs. Romayne was already in the carriage; and he ran hastily downstairs, put on his overcoat, and proceeded to join her.

"I'm awfully sorry, dear," he said, with eager apology. "I thought it was earlier. The fact is, I was awfully late getting in. I found 'ladies' teas' going on at the club—so awfully stupid of me to forget—you might have liked to go—and it was rather good fun. How are you, dear?"

He had let himself into the brougham as he spoke, had shut the door, and seated himself by the figure he could only dimly see sitting rather back in the corner so that little or no light fell on her face. He had kissed her, hardly stemming the flood of his eloquence for the purpose; and he now hardly waited for her word or two of reply before he plunged once more into eager, amusing talk. He did not give his mother time to do more than answer monosyllabically, and it followed that her silence did not strike him. He sprang out, when the carriage stopped, to give her his hand, but before he had given his instruction to the coachman, and followed her into the house, she had disappeared into the ladies' cloak-room. Consequently it was not until she came to him as he waited to follow her into the drawing-room that he really saw her. As his eyes rested on the figure coming towards him, he suddenly saw, not it, but a sweet, white face with wistful eyes looking at him from out of a dingy frame.

CHAPTER XXL

ALWAYS excellently dressed, Mrs. Romayne's appearance at that moment was brilliant; almost excessively brilliant it seemed for a small dinner party. Her frock was of the most pronounced type of full-dress, and she wore diamonds, not many, but so disposed, as was her reddish-

brown hair, as to make the greatest possible effect. But the detail which had caught her son's experienced eye, and which had brought before him by some unaccountable law of contrast that other woman's face, lay in the fact that to-night for the first time his mother was slightly "made up." The colour on her cheeks, the bright effectiveness of her eyes, was the result of art. It made her look haggard, Julian decided with careless, indifferent distaste, and then he was following her into the room.

She had hardly paused to speak to him; apparently she imagined that they were late.

They were widely separated at dinner, and were not thrown together, as it happened, during the whole evening. But Mrs. Romayne's personality was a factor in the party not to be ignored that night; she was delightful, everybody said; and to Julian that newly acquired sense of his mother's artificiality was accentuated as the evening passed on into something like repugnance; a repugnance which, when he was seated with her at last in the brougham and driving home, produced in him a strong disinclination to rouse himself to an assumption of vivacity, and made him occupy himself with his own thoughts so exclusively that he never noticed that his mother uttered not a single word.

"Good night, mother!" he said absently, as they stood together in the hall. He was stooping to kiss her when she stopped him with a slight, peremptory gesture.

"I want to speak to you!" she said. Her voice was tense and a little hoarse. Without another word, without so much as glancing at him, she passed him and led the way to his smoking-room; turned up the lamp with a quick, hard gesture, and then turned and faced him.

All the colour had faded from Julian's face, and he had followed her slowly. With the first sound of her voice the conviction had come to him that he was discovered. There were certain weaknesses in him, hitherto undeveloped by the circumstances of his life, but radical factors in his character. Morally speaking he was a coward. His hour had come, and he was afraid to meet it. He came just inside the door and stood leaning against the writing-table, confronting his mother, but neither looking at her nor speaking.

"Tell me where you have been since Friday!" she said, low and peremptorily; and then she stopped herself abruptly,

putting out her hand as though to prevent him from speaking, as a spasm of pain distorted her face. "No!" she said, in a hoarse, breathless way. "No, don't! You'll tell me a lie. Don't! I know!"

She had put out her hand and was steadyng herself by the high oak mantelpiece—part of her recent present to Julian—but her face was rigid and set, and her eyes, full of a strange, indefinable agony, which she seemed to be all the while holding desperately at bay, never left the pale, downcast, almost sullen face opposite her.

With a determined wrench and setting in motion of all his faculties, Julian pulled himself together so far as to take refuge in that sure resort of the deficient in moral courage—an assumption of jaunty and light-hearted non-comprehension. Perhaps he had never in his life been more like his mother than he was at that moment as he threw back his head and answered, with an affected gaiety which was somewhat hollow and unsuccesful:

"What do you know, dear? You're coming it rather strong, aren't you?"

"I know that you have been living with a common work-girl somewhere in Camden Town for a month or more!"

The words were spoken in the same hoarse voice which rang now, low as it was, with an intolerable disgust. But its expression seemed to affect Julian not at all. The words themselves were occupying all his perception. A quick frown of consideration appeared on his forehead, as though some relief or reprieve had come to him, bringing with it possibilities the skilful turning to account of which called into play his mental faculties, and in so doing strung up his nerve. He dropped his artificiality of manner, and seemed to brace himself to meet the emergency in which he found himself. The situation had evidently suddenly altered its character for him. He was no longer cowed by it.

There was a pause—a pause in which Mrs. Romayne's eyes seemed to dilate and contract, and dilate again under the suffering to which she allowed expression in neither tone nor gesture; and then there came from Julian four awkward, hardly audible words, jerked out rather than spoken, with long pauses intervening:

"How do you know?"

A short, sharp breath came from Mrs. Romayne, and then she said, with cold decisiveness, though it seemed that nothing would take that hoarseness from her voice:

"It matters very little how I know. That I know by one chance; that some one else may know by another; some one else again by another—the details in each case, when the chances are innumerable, are nothing! Have you lived all this time in London not to know that discovery is inevitable—to wonder 'how' when it comes?"

There was a bitterness, a keenness of scorn in her voice which stung him like a lash, and he answered hotly:

"After all, mother, we are not living in Arcadia! We don't talk about these things; and I'm awfully sorry, I'm sure, that this should have come to your knowledge. I'm awfully sorry to offend you; but, hang it all, I'm not worse than lots of fellows about!"

His tone had gathered confidence and defiance as he went on, and it seemed to shake her a little. Her hold on the mantelpiece tightened, and she spoke quickly and a little nervously.

"It's very likely," she said. "I don't want to argue the principle with you. Young men have their own ideas, I know; but how many young men—drop out? How many young men, with good positions, good chances, somehow or other get into bad odour; get to be not received—or, if they are received, it is with certain reservation—through this kind of thing? Oh, of course I don't say it's inevitable. There are lots of men about, as you say! But it's an awful risk. In the case of a young man like you, with no title to the position you hold in society but your—your personality, don't you see, it is a double and treble risk. It is playing with edged tools; it is holding a knife to your own throat. You would go under so horribly easily."

She paused abruptly, as though the image before her eyes were too terrible to her to be pursued further, and tried to moisten her dry lips, on which the touch of paint had cracked now, showing how white they were beneath. The ghastliness of the incongruity between her manner and the superficialities of which she spoke was indescribable. Julian did not speak; he was moving one foot to and fro slowly over the carpet, at which he gazed immoveably, and his mother went on almost immediately:

"You must give it up, Julian," she said incisively. "I will do anything that is necessary in the way of money; I don't want to be hard upon you, my boy. Oh,

my boy ! Anything the girl wants you shall have ; but you must break with her at once."

She paused again, but still Julian did not speak ; still he did not raise his eyes. She went on with a growing insistence in her voice which went hand in hand with a growing agony of appeal :

" If you don't see the necessity now, you must believe me when I tell you that you will—you will. Look, dear ! your life is surely not so dull that you need run after such distraction as that. You shall marry if you want to. You shall marry any one you like. But you must—you must give this up. Julian—" She stopped for a moment, and her voice grew thin, almost faint, as she pressed so heavily on the carving by which she held that her hand was bruised and blackened. " Julian, I am not telling you what it has been to me to know that you have deceived me. I am not going to try and make you feel—I don't want you to feel it, dear—what it has been to me to go over your home-life of the last few weeks and know that you have lied to me at every turn—to me, who have only wanted to make you happy. I won't reproach you. Perhaps young men think it a kind of right—a kind of right—" She repeated the sentence, unfinished as it was, as though it contained an idea to which she clung. " It is not for my sake—to spare my feelings, that I tell you you must give it up. It is for your own. Julian, my boy, you must believe me."

Her words, quivering with entreaty, died away ; her eyes, full of supplication, were fixed on his ; and Julian spoke—spoke without lifting his eyes from the ground.

" Suppose I married her ? " he said in a low, shame-faced voice.

" What ! " The monosyllable rang out sharp and vibrating, and Mrs. Romayne, all softness or relaxation struck from her face and figure in one sudden bracing of every muscle, stood staring at him out of eyes alive with horror.

" Suppose—I married—her ! "

" Supposing that—I will tell you ! You would have to keep her and yourself ! You would have no more of my money, and you would never be acknowledged in my house again ! " Her low voice was like fine, cold steel, and she paused. Then quite suddenly, as though the horror kept at bay in her eyes had leapt up and mastered her in an instant, she flung out her hands wildly, crying : " Julian, Julian ! You are

not married ? Tell me, tell me you are not married ? "

And Julian, white to the very lips, said low and hurriedly :

" No ! "

There was a long silence. With a choked, hysterical cry, Mrs. Romayne dropped into a chair near her, and covered her face with her hands. Julian drew out his pocket-handkerchief and mechanically wiped his forehead. At last he began, in a nervous, uneven voice :

" Mother, look here, I—you don't quite understand me ! I—she—it's—it's not the kind of girl you think ! " He stopped and drew his hand desperately before his eyes. That innocent white face, in its dingy frame, what did it want before his eyes now ? How could he get on if he kept looking at it. " She—we—it was my fault ! Mother, look here, I ought ! "

Mrs. Romayne took her hands away from her face and clenched them together.

" You shall not," she said in a low, steady voice.

" She—she—was an awfully good girl, don't you know. She's not—of course she's not one of our sort, but—she would learn. Mother, after all, why not ? Nothing else can—can make it right ! "

" Nothing else can ruin you completely ! " was the steady answer. " You shall never do it if I can prevent it. I have told you what I would do ; think it well over. Think what it would mean to you to have not one farthing but what you can earn ! To be cut by every one who knows you ! To be without a chance of any kind. I told you that if you married I would disown you ! Now I tell you something else ! Break off this miserable connection and you shall have, as I said, anything in reason to give the girl in compensation once and for all. Refuse to do so and I will cut off your allowance until you come to your senses ! "

" Mother ! " he cried fiercely. " By Heaven, mother ! "

" You can take your choice ! " was the unmoved answer.

Her face was sharp and haggard ; the artificial colour stood out on it in great patches, throwing into relief the livid pallor beneath. She had thrown aside her cloak as though the physical oppression was unbearable to her, and the contrast between her face and her gorgeous dress with its glittering ornaments was horrible.

A smothered oath broke from the

young man, and lifting his right hand, he began to rub it slowly up and down the back of his head as an expression of heavy, fierce cogitation settled down upon his face. To his unutterable surprise as he made the gesture, there stole over his mother's face an expression of such deadly terror as he had never before seen. He stopped involuntarily, and she staggered to her feet, holding out two quivering, imploring hands. For the first time in his life Julian was using a gesture habitual in his dead father; for the first time in his life, looking into her son's face, Mrs. Romayne saw there the face of William Romayne.

"My boy!" she gasped. "My boy. Don't do that! Don't look like that, for Heaven's sake! For Heaven's sake!"

She swayed for a moment to and fro, and then fell heavily forward into his arms.

BY THE AVON IN APRIL.

IF there be one season more suitable than another for a trip to Shakespeare's Stratford, that season is spring; and if there be a month fitter than another, that month is April. For apart from the beauty presented by pure English landscape, when Nature begins to don her verdant robe, we should remember that it was in the month of April that the world's poet made not only his first entrance on, but his final exit from the scene of "this strange eventful history." Sentiment is out of fashion nowadays, but there are certain emotional sensations which, being ineradicable in civilised man, alike defy fashion and time, and the Shakespearean sentiment is assuredly one of them. Few cultivated people would wish to banish this of all others from their lives, however afraid of incurring ridicule. The stupendous, wide-reaching, undying genius of the man, the cloud of obscurity which shrouds all but the broadest features of his life, the scarcity of reliable relics and records of his personality, all serve to invest such as remain with the highest interest and value; and since these are to be found in greater abundance in the town and neighbourhood of his birth and death than anywhere else in the wide world, it is not wonderful that Stratford-on-Avon should possess an attraction far beyond that of any other locality celebrated as the cradle or tomb of some distinguished intellect.

These things being granted as ample reasons for the popularity of the pilgrimage, it is easy to show why it should be especially performed during that week which embraces the twenty-third of April. Sentiment once admitted, we carry it to the anniversary of birth and death as a matter of course, albeit three hundred years and more have elapsed since the events we desire to revive and celebrate happened. When we stand on the actual ground once trodden by the revered dead, their footsteps seem to fall with a louder echo, as year by year the date recurs. When face to face with the places and the objects on which his gentle, loving, yet penetrating eyes have rested, and which he may have touched and handled many a score of times, and from every item of which he drew his profound, no less than simple knowledge, his similes and symbols, interpreting each and all with his own majestic words; why, when we do this, we say that the imagination travels with greater facility, and pictures more vividly the aspect of the man and the times in which he lived and moved and had his being.

Here, to wit in Stratford town, we can conjure up the quaint old, narrow, unpaved streets, the gable-ended, overhanging, half-timbered houses, peculiar to Merry England in these parts, and above all, the old house itself in Henley Street as it may have looked when the baby boy lay gazing up at the huge beam in the room where he first saw the light. The church and churchyard are once more peopled with the crowd habited in the quaint garb of the period as, fifty-three years later, they gathered in groups and knots along the lime-shadowed avenue awaiting the procession of mourners about to consign to the dust all that was perishable of that immortal intellect. Bending over the tomb itself, and gazing at the monument, what a new impressiveness they both acquire when we can count to a nicety the total of the vanished epochs! See, for instance, how the fact of actually standing on the spot affected Sir Walter Scott, when he on one occasion happened to pay a visit to Shakespeare's Stratford in the month of April, 1828. In his delightful journal he thus briefly gives us a hint of the feelings it aroused:

"We visited the tomb of the Mighty Wizard. It is in the bad taste of James the First's reign; but what a magic does the locality possess! There are stately

monuments of forgotten families; but when you have seen Shakespeare's, what care we for the rest? All around is Shakespeare's exclusive property."

His reference also to the actual birthplace, if slight, may be worth quoting, as showing at once how alive he was to all connected with it, and how humorously he dovetailed his sarcasm about parsimony and charity in with the true sentiment awakened by the town:

"After breakfast I asked after the old madwoman who was for some time tenant of Shakespeare's house, and conceived herself to be descended from the immortal poet. I learned she was dying. I thought to send her a sovereign, but this extension of our tour has left me no more than will carry me through my journey, and I do not like to run short upon the road. So I take credit for my good intention, and keep my sovereign—a cheap and not unusual mode of giving charity."

It was on a previous visit made in the autumn of 1821, that this other wizard, and his then companion, Mr. Stewart Rose, wrote their names on the wall of the house in Henley Street. There is no record of his having been led thither by the actual anniversary; but we must remember that travelling in his day was a very different business to what it is in the present. It was only in his passage to and fro between Edinburgh and London that he could ever do homage at the shrine, and shrines, for which Warwickshire is celebrated—not forgetting that of Kenilworth, where he went, of course, more than once. He does not, oddly enough, on his final visit to Stratford as described in the journal on the eighth of April, 1828, seem to have remembered the additional significance which the particular month has, but it is hardly likely that he was wholly unob-servant of it, or that it failed to add additional interest to the occasion, albeit he chanced to be there a week or two before the celebrated date itself. His mind was far too appreciative, we may be sure, for the twenty-third to have escaped him, although he does not mention it. However this may be, we, who have rail and steam at our command, and can put ourselves within that magic circle of the Midlands in the space of a few hours, should, as already urged, contrive to do so during what has been called the rainbow month, for, as it is in looking at the recorded date of the monument with our bodily eyes we are better able to tot up

the flight of time, so is it with the intermediate ages of that life which began and ended here—ended, alas! before the completion of those seven classified by himself in his own immortal lines.

Very conspicuously, for example, do we see in the grammar school in the High Street, amidst its crowd of urchins, the chubby boy of "small Latin and less Greek," "with shining morning face, creeping like snail, unwillingly to school." A while later we can get a peep of Charlcote Park, much as it must have appeared when that deer-lifting escapade happened. How its umbrageous shades helped Scott's imagination vividly to picture the Shakespearean times is again well worthy of citation :

"The Hall," he says, "is about three hundred years old, an old brick structure with a gate-house in advance. It is surrounded by venerable oaks, realising the imagery which Shakespeare loved so well to dwell upon; rich, verdant pastures extend on every side, and numerous herds of deer were reposing in the shade; all showed that the Lucy family had retained their land and beeves."

The descendant of Sir Thomas Lucy—the justice who rendered Warwickshire too hot for the poet, and drove him to London—who did the honours of his house to Sir Walter, it appears, told him that "the park from which Shakespeare stole the buck was not that which surrounds Charlcote, but belonged to a mansion at some distance where Sir Thomas Lucy resided at the time of the trespass. The tradition went that they hid the buck in a barn, part of which was standing a few years ago, but now totally decayed."

The whole story, of course, is apocryphal, but one cannot avoid letting it take its place with the rest for what it is worth, when wandering amidst the shades of the old town and the neighbouring Charlcote. The true spirit of their influence is faithfully depicted by Sir Walter in his final words touching this his last visit to Warwickshire.

It "gave me great pleasure," he writes, "it really brought Justice Shallow freshly before my eyes; the luces in his arms, 'which do become an old coat well,' were not more plainly portrayed in his own armorials in the Hall window than was his person in my mind's eye. There is a picture shown at the mansion as that of the old Sir Thomas, but Mr. Lucy conjectures it represents his son. There were

three descendants of the same name of Thomas. The party hath 'the eye severe, and beard of formal cut,' which fills up with judicious austerity the otherwise social physiognomy of the worshipful presence, with his 'fair round belly with fat capon lined.'

For the sake of these things it is that we go to the shrine on the banks of the Avon; without them, and what they call up, the place can have no especial attraction; with them, the region is alive with romance and poetry. The dead past palpitates again, and carrying on our mental no less than our bodily ramblings, we see the man of gay yet thoughtful mien trudging over the fields 'twixt Stratford and Shottery on his love-making expeditions. We behold the church again by the river, where he took to wife the woman of his fancy, and despite its sacrilegious demolition, we can readily trace out at least the ground-plan of New Place, the edifice where he passed, in well-earned repose, his final days and ended them. You may linger there for a moment, if only to express amazement that such an edifice could have been so treated, and above all by hands which ought, beyond most others, to have preserved with reverence so sacred a relic from desecration.

The history of its destruction during the eighteenth century, an age distinguished for many a similar sacrilegious act, runs to the following effect. "In 1756," we are told by a devout Shakespearean, "the house was purchased by one Francis Gastrell, a reverend incumbent of some parish at Lichfield. This noble specimen of the Church's dignity began by cutting down the mulberry tree planted by Shakespeare's own hand, that precious emblem under which Garrick, Macklin, and others were entertained by Sir John Clopton in 1742. Nor did the building long escape Mr. Gastrell's iconoclastic hand. It was his custom to live at Lichfield, and to leave New Place without a tenant from year's end to year's end. In the absence of its owner, New Place was assessed to pay rates for the maintenance of the poor, and vowing that it should never cost him another shilling, the shameless cleric, 'dead,' as Garrick observed, 'to all Nature's finer feelings,' razed to the ground the building in which Shakespeare and Ben Jonson had made merry, and which must have been redolent with priceless memories."

Nevertheless, these and many more similar shadows, we say, come trooping through our minds with greater substance in them, when we are conscious that we stand, as it were, on the boards of the very theatre where they played their many parts, and acted out the domestic drama of real life, the interest in which can never die. The scenery, dresses, and decorations appear in a large degree to be extant still, and if altered and repainted in places, or adapted and contrived to suit our modern needs, there is yet enough and to spare of the real properties to foster the fond illusions of so laudable an imagining.

Filled with the Shakespearean sentiment, therefore, after this fashion, let us carry it a step farther, and, in so doing, find yet other reasons for undertaking the pilgrimage to the shrine during the month of smiles and tears. Never do the willow-fringed banks of the silver Avon show to greater advantage than on a fine day in April,

When daisies pied, and violets blue,
And ladies' smocks all silver-white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue,
Do paint the meadows with delight.

If the moon should make the night vie with the day in brilliancy and beauty, you will do well to linger by the river, and within the precincts of the church, until its bell records with melodious clang the advent of the twenty-third. For then, 'tis said, you will hear such a burst of woodland song break out as nothing short of enchantment could call forth—the song of nightingales, of all the nightingales, it would seem, that have their nests in Warwickshire. Hitherto the chief harmony of the woods has been of a rougher sort. The cawing rooks, with their young families high up in the elms around the spire, have had it nearly all their own way, and though according well with the situation, and lending a rural accompaniment to the scene, their clamour has at times well-nigh deafened you. You may, indeed, have hailed their bedtime with satisfaction for the mere silence which it brought, but now that silence is broken without offence, especially when its meaning is interpreted by the fanciful legend still regarded lovingly by the good burghers of the town. They will tell you that the sweet-throated minstrels uplift their voices at this hour in salutation of the auspicious day it heralds. They are supposed to behold the poet's spirit, as once a year on the stroke of midnight it wanders forth from its sacred

resting-place and revisits the "glimpses of the moon." We mortals are, of course, too dull-eyed to see it, but the birds have a keener sense, and understand whose shade it is that passes. They know it as the master's, their friend—the essence of that divine mind, which compassed more, and spoke what it compassed better, than ever mortal did before, or since, or ever will, or can.

Here is a phase of sentiment for you, then, well fitted to crown and finish that which should be evoked by the material relics and records of the mighty poet. If in imagination you have enjoyed his presence as it wandered side by side with you through the haunts of his childhood, youth, and middle age, you may carry on the idea most fittingly through the agency of these kindly nightingales. The fact, as it is asserted, that they give no sign or note of their presence until they are aware of his, may be shadowy and vague—ridiculous to the cynic and his kind—but, if you are to visit Stratford to any purpose, you must carry with you all the faith your generous nature can muster. For, if you are not generous, genial, and credulous, willing to accept the unseen as likely to be as solid and certainly more permanent than the seen, you have little business in the town or neighbourhood at all. Should you, however, at any time find yourself there by accident, it is well that you should know how some folks value and regard the precious spot. If you take up your abode at the "Red Lion," and do the place in the ordinary way by merely looking at it, you will really enjoy yourself much better at many a worse inn. If you are there merely because you wish to say you have been, refrain from going. If you do not believe that he was born, lived, and died at Stratford-on-Avon, or that he wrote the plays attributed to him, there will be little interest for you in that old town itself. Without the interest attaching to it there is but little to see.

A ROMANCE OF THE IRISH HOUSE OF LORDS.

AN OLD STORY RETOLD.

Now that Parliament is likely to be occupied for some time with debates on Home Rule, the story of a famous trial, in which the Irish House of Lords appeared for the last time as judges of one of their order, may not be without interest. It is

another instance of the little regard for life or law displayed by that impetuous, high-handed, spendthrift, duelling race of Irish gentlemen whose recklessness and extravagance met such heavy retribution in the days when first the "Incumbered Estates Court Act" came into operation, when their mortgaged estates passed into other hands and their names vanished from the land.

Maurice, Earl of Kingston, was one of the members of the Irish House of Peers, and was by no means the least remarkable for those wild feats upon which gentlemen in these days prided themselves, and in which in later times the late Marquis of Waterford was so renowned an adept. He was a devoted believer in that doctrine afterwards publicly enunciated—and perhaps rendered sacred—by Grattan's dying advice to his son, "Be always ready with the pistol, Harry, be always ready with the pistol." He was to an extraordinary degree freehanded and lavish with his money; and the mortgages on his estates—which were wide and ample—piled themselves with singular rapidity.

After a time Earl Kingston found that the pace was becoming too fast, and that a fresh mine must be found or a tighter rein be drawn. The latter was not to be for a moment thought of; and, as fortune generally favours the brave, the former turned up—turned up in the presence of a young heiress in Kildare.

Caroline, daughter of Richard Fitzgerald, of Ophaly, was of the princely race of the Geraldines, who had come to Ireland in the conquering train of Henry the Second. The estates which had come into her possession by the death of an only brother were very large, and accordingly a match was made up between her and Viscount Kingsborough, Lord Kingston's eldest son; and in the year 1769 the marriage took place.

Lady Kingsborough's brother had left an illegitimate son, Gerald Fitzgerald, and him the kind-hearted lady had caused to be reared and educated as befitted the high race—on the father's side at any rate—from which he sprang. When he was of age a commission was purchased for him in the army; and as the young fellow was of handsome presence, good address, and undoubtedly courage, he rose speedily to the rank of Colonel. He finally wooed and won a lady of high rank; and his house near Richmond, on the banks of the Thames, was a centre at which the gayest and brightest of London society did not hesitate to meet.

To Lord and Lady Kingsborough were born, in course of time, a numerous family, and amongst the younger branches was a daughter, Lady Mary King—King being the family name. The education of this growing generation made it necessary for the family to leave their mansions in Cork and Kildare and betake themselves to London, outside of which they secured a suitable house and park. Unfortunately it lay in the direction of Richmond also, and was by consequence close to Colonel Fitzgerald's. Naturally the grown-up members were frequently to be found at their kinsman's, enjoying the pleasant and attractive society to be had there; and amongst those most frequent in attendance was Lady Mary.

She is described at this time as an exceedingly attractive girl, just verging on womanhood, with beautiful sparkling eyes, and a profusion of singularly long hair streaming down her back. Few could see her without being struck with her appearance. Unlike the rest of the family she was very quiet and staid—indeed, almost demure and religious—in her manner; and many marvelled how one of her retiring disposition could find pleasure in the gay and airy society of Glenville Hall. She seemed to do so, however, and in her quiet, unobtrusive way became not only a frequent but a constant visitor.

One fine summer morning in the year 1797 the young lady's maid entered her bedroom as usual, but only to find what was not usual—what, on the contrary, was surprising and startling—that the young lady was absent, and that her bed had not been lain on during the night. She had disappeared, apparently, some time after the others had retired to rest. A little searching discovered a note, carefully sealed with red sealing-wax, after the fashion of the time, lying in her desk. It intimated her intention of drowning herself in the Thames, whose waters rushed hard by.

Search was immediately made; family and servants rushed to the water's edge; the closest scrutiny was made everywhere. Their diligence was at length rewarded—if rewarded be the term to use under the circumstances—in the finding of the young lady's bonnet and shawl under a tree growing in a secluded place by the riverside. This gave ample corroboration to the statements made in the letter.

Why should she have done it? What was the impelling motive? These were the questions asked by the domestics,

whilst the family abandoned themselves to the wildest despair. Could it be disappointed love? No; the idea was absurd as applied to one of her quiet and staid manner. Sudden aberration of mind? No; that was equally out of the question. The family were perplexed beyond all telling. For some days the river was dragged in all directions for the body, but fruitlessly. It must have been swept towards the sea; though, considering the stagnant side-wash where her bonnet was found, that was unlikely.

By degrees, from the absence of motive and the non-discovery of the body, speculation took another direction. Could she have threatened suicide without having any intention of carrying it out? Had she any other motive? Enquiries were made in other directions, and not without result.

The young lady, without being positively beautiful, was fairly attractive; but, in particular, she was noted for the magnificence of her hair, which grew to extraordinary length and in great profusion. When the attention of all London had been excited by the mysterious disappearance of the young lady, a post-boy belonging to one of the large posting establishments turned up with a curious story. He had been engaged by a gentleman to drive a post-chaise out of London on the morning in question, and when some distance out of the city they had met a young lady walking alone. Her singular wealth of hair and aristocratic appearance attracted his attention. When they came up to her, the gentleman invited her into the carriage, and the post-boy was desired to return to the city. On arriving there both descended; the post-boy drove to the posting establishment alone, and there the matter for the time ended.

This statement drove conjecture in a new direction; it was now assumed that she had eloped with some one—though nobody could ever guess whom, for the young lady had been at all times of a peculiarly staid and unromantic disposition. Accordingly posters and advertisements were displayed on all the walls and in the newspapers of the city, and every friend of the family—and they were numerous, as one would naturally expect, from their great wealth and position—exerted himself to the utmost to find out her whereabouts.

One morning some weeks after, and

whilst the city was wonderfully excited over the matter, a girl, commonly dressed, called at the mansion and asked to see Lady Kingsborough. Introduced to that lady's presence, she had a story to tell. She was servant in a lodging-house in Clayton Street, Kensington, and thither some weeks previously, she said, a young lady answering to the description of Miss King, as given in the newspapers, had been brought. Even before any public attention had been drawn to the matter, she was attracted by the aristocratic appearance and beautiful hair of the visitor, and by the unusual fact of such a person appearing at such a place. The heavy reward offered had spurred her thoughts, and she had come to the belief that the visitor in question was the missing young lady.

While she was narrating her story to the afflicted lady, the door of the drawing-room opened, and Colonel Fitzgerald, still busy in his quest, walked in and began to make his usual enquiries as to whether any fresh information had been obtained. The servant's eyes glanced over him in perfect amazement.

"Why, my gracious!" said she at last; "this is the gentleman who brought the young lady to Clayton Street."

Lady Kingsborough's cries and exclamations brought a number of the family into the apartment. But in the confusion attendant on the circumstances, Colonel Fitzgerald withdrew, gained the hall-door, and fled. His depravity and treachery had been discovered; he could not bear the shame of the discovery; still less dare he face the overwhelming wrath of the family; and full of confusion and fear, he fled with all possible haste. At once the detectives were set on the new trail; the missing girl was discovered in a small cottage belonging to Colonel Fitzgerald, taken away, and sent to Ireland.

Colonel King—afterwards Lord Lorton—immediately challenged Fitzgerald. To do the unfortunate man justice he did not lack courage of this character, and promptly prepared to meet his challenger. Vengeful as Colonel King was, the wrong-doer seemed equally determined on blood. His character, however, had become so odious that he could find no officer or gentleman in London to act as his second. Under the circumstances he announced his determination to depend for the management of the affair on Colonel Wood—Colonel King's second. The surgeon in attendance at

the scene, appealed to, refused to act as his friend. It was on a Sunday morning, October the first, 1797, that the parties met behind the Magazine in Hyde Park. Four shots were fired in succession; but owing to, probably, the excitement of the parties, none took effect. The second interfered to try and effect an arrangement but neither would hear of it, and the duel continued. Two further shots were exchanged, again with no result; the ammunition of the parties was exhausted, and they separated with the intention of meeting again next morning. That day both combatants were arrested and locked up.

The place to which Miss King had been removed was Mitchelstown Castle, County Cork. It was a secluded place in the midst of dense woods, the "fairy Funcheon" flowing beneath its walls. Here she had plenty of time for regret and repentance. Unhappily, with her was sent to Ireland a maid in Colonel Fitzgerald's interest, who communicated to him the girl's place of detention. Thither the infatuated man followed her. He stayed at a small hamlet outside the demesne gates, remaining within all day and roaming through the park at night. In a small place conduct like this attracts attention, and word was brought to Lord Kingsborough, then at Fermoy on an inspection of the Cork yeomanry and militia. Suspecting that some emissary of Fitzgerald's was there, Lord Kingsborough drove at once to Mitchelstown Castle, and called at the inn where the stranger was stopping. There he learned that he had left earlier in the day for Kilworth, and on enquiring of the post-boy who had driven him, found that he had put up at the hotel there. From the description given of him, his lordship concluded that the hiding stranger was no other than Colonel Fitzgerald. He immediately ordered a chaise, and, informing his son of the particulars, drove with him to Kilworth with all possible speed.

Enquiring of the hotel-keeper whether such a person had arrived, his lordship was told he had, and was then in his bedroom. His lordship sent up his compliments, desiring to see him, but the bedroom door was locked, and the inmate, probably having seen their entrance to the hotel yard, gruffly answered that he should not be disturbed for the night. Lord Kingsborough and his son, hearing the voice recognised it; the latter, frantic with rage

and hate, rushed upstairs, threw himself bodily against the door, burst it in, and grappled with Fitzgerald just as he had snatched up a loaded pistol. The struggle was mad and furious for a moment or two, until Lord Kingsborough entered the apartment, and placing a pistol to Colonel Fitzgerald's head, shot him dead on the spot.

If the interest excited before was great, it now became intense! The two gentlemen were arrested and as speedily as might be brought to trial. True bills were found against them by the Grand Jury; but the family power and influence was too great in the country, and on the trial at the assizes held in April, 1798, the Hon. Robert King was acquitted by the jury empanelled to try him. The Lord Kingsborough having in the meantime succeeded to the title of the Earl of Kingston, claimed the privileges of his rank and demanded to be tried by his peers. The claim was necessarily conceded, and on the eighteenth of May, 1798, the trial came on in the House of Lords in the ancient Parliament of the Irish nation.

The Irish noblemen and gentlemen were always remarkable for their reckless magnificence, or, as others ungenerously put it, for extravagant spendthriftiness, but on this occasion College Green showed more than usual splendour and stateliness. The great hall of the House of Lords was crowded. Two marquises, twenty-seven earls, fourteen viscounts, three archbishops, thirteen bishops, and fourteen barons assembled. An enormous number of spectators assembled to witness the trial.

The Lords adjourned their proceedings to the lower chamber of Parliament, the place appointed for the trial, as being more suitable than their own handsome but confined apartment. Their procession on that occasion was the last piece of pageantry which the Irish House of Peers exhibited. They marched, two by two, into the House of Commons; the masters in Chancery and the robed Judges of the Courts of Law preceding them. Immediately before the Lords walked in procession the minors of their order not entitled to vote and the eldest sons of the peers.

Then began the fantastic spectacle which the crowd had come to see. Reverences and salaams were duly made by Serjeants-at-Arms, clerks in Chancery, and clerks of the Queen's Bench. There were crossings to the right and left and reverences to his Grace, the Lord High Steward, on the

woolsack. The King's commission appointing the Earl of Clare president was read aloud, all the peers standing up uncovered; the writ of certiorari and the return to it was read; and then the clerk of the Crown directed the Serjeant-at-Arms to make proclamation to the Constable at Dublin Castle to bring his prisoner, Robert Earl of Kingston, to the bar.

"Oyez! oyez! oyez! Constable of Dublin Castle, bring forth Robert Earl of Kingston to the bar, puruant to the order of the House of Lords. God save the King!"

Then, amid dead silence, that nobleman was ushered in by the Constable and Deputy-Constable of Dublin Castle, the latter of whom carried the axe, standing on the left hand of the prisoner, the edge turned towards him. The latter made a low reverence to the President, and to the Peers at either side of him. He then fell upon his knees at the bar. Upon being told to rise, he again bowed to Lord Clare and all the Peers, who with grave dignity returned the salutation.

Lord Clare from the woolsack addressed him after reading the charges:

"How say you, Robert Earl of Kingston—are you guilty or not guilty of this murder and felony for which you stand arraigned?"

The Earl replied:

"Not guilty."

"How will your lordship be tried?"

"By God and my Peers."

"God send you a good deliverance."

The Serjeant-at-Arms then made proclamation:

"Oyez! oyez! oyez! All manner of persons who will give evidence upon oath before our Sovereign Lord, the King, against Robert Earl of Kingston, the prisoner at the bar, let them come forth, and they shall be heard, for he now stands at the bar upon deliverance."

No witnesses, however, appeared. Either arrangements had been made with the widow and children of the slain man, or they were not sufficiently concerned over his death to interfere.

Then after some matters of form had been gone through, Lord Clare called over the Peers individually by name, beginning with the junior Baron, and asked:

"Is Robert Earl of Kingston guilty of the murder and felony whereof he stands indicted, or not guilty?"

Thereupon every Peer present, severally, standing up uncovered, answered, "Not

guilty, upon my honour," laying his hand on his heart.

Lord Clare summoned the prisoner to the bar again, and briefly informed him of his acquittal without a dissenting voice. Lord Kingston made three reverences to the Peers and retired.

The white staff was handed to the President, who, holding it in both his hands, broke it in two, and declared the commission dissolved. This spectacle of semi-barbaric pomp was the last, for two years after the Irish Parliament was abolished.

The cause of all the trouble lived obscurely in England, dying after a good old age. The Peerage is now extinct.

WITH THE SMUGGLERS.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

I DO not think any one will contradict me or accuse me of self-conceit when I say that I—Jules Bridoux—am one of the cleverest bee-keepers in the province of Luxembourg, not to say in the village of Vivy, where I now live. Every one knows that much about me, but I do not think that many know how I came to settle here, and to give up the trade of blacksmith to which I was brought up. I have not often told the story, but I do not know why I should not. It is not a bad story in its way, and may pass away half an hour for any one who cares to listen to it.

I am not a native of Vivy. The village in which I was born—Sugny—lies three leagues south from here, close to the French frontier of Belgium. It is a famous village in its way, though outwardly it is a poor little place enough. It contains perhaps six hundred souls, and the largest house is the Auberge Regnault. Opposite the inn is my father's forge, where I learnt my old trade. There was never a press of work in our smithy; sometimes several days would pass without the fire being lighted. We could not possibly have lived on my father's earnings as a blacksmith, even when the produce of his little plot of land on the hillside was added. My mother, like most of the other women of Sugny, kept a couple of cows, and carried her milk and butter regularly over the frontier to Sedan. That was not a very lucrative trade either. Her dairy profits did not go far towards feeding and clothing me and my five brothers and sisters.

Yet we were fed and clothed, and though money was not plentiful, I do not remember ever to have been exactly in want. The word of the enigma is not far to seek. If you had watched us children of Sugny playing when we came out of school you would soon have learnt it. You would have seen us form two bands, one of which would try to pass a given line with a concealed packet, while the others would try to capture them and take their treasure. It was a game of which we never tired. We called it playing at "fraudeurs," and "fraudeur," as no doubt you know, is just another word for smuggler.

That was how we began, girls and boys alike. Later on we played at the game in earnest. The girls took to carrying milk, and looked on the rigorous daily search at the douane as a mere trial of wits with the douaniers. Sometimes a little packet of tobacco or snuff or the like was brought to light in the hem of a dress or the crown of a bonnet; more often the hider was cleverer than the seeker, and the milk-woman added her few sous' worth of "fraude" to the hard-earned profits of her day. With the boys, when they had grown tall and strong, it was a more serious matter. The men of Sugny are "fraudeurs d'élite." They choose the darkest night, the least trodden path through the great borderland forest, run the gauntlet of a hundred dangers with consignments of contraband which would compromise the little all of those concerned, and then return triumphant—as a rule—in the grey dawn to divide the profits over a glass of pécquée at the Auberge Regnault.

By the time I was four-and-twenty my apprenticeship as a "fraudeur" was over. I had taken to growing tobacco on my own account, and reckoned myself a match for half-a-dozen douaniers. I did not hesitate even to try and drive a bargain, single-handed, with Paul Pochet, which required more gumption than went to the outwitting of any number of douaniers.

Paul Pochet, the landlord of a rough little inn on the French side of the border, was the handiest and most dependable man to whom we of Sugny could dispose of our contraband goods. He was, indeed, our natural ally, being the cleverest receiver anywhere along the frontier. More than once prohibited goods had been traced to his very door; more than once the Café Pochet had been searched from its ill-slated roof to the slimy corners of its damp

cellar. During the search Pochet would stand by, the picture of outraged innocence, protesting a little, but making no effort to arrest the searchers. Yet he always baffled them—till, at last, his cunning became the proverb alike of douanier and smuggler. He was, you see, the natural ally of us men of Sugny, notwithstanding the way he beat down our profits to the lowest possible figure. "How can I give you more?" he would say, when we protested. "I must make a profit too. Do I look like a rich man? What can a man do who has so many mouths to fill as I have?"

He had a large family, it is true, but it was not the bringing up of his children which kept him poor. We all knew how and where he squandered his ill-gotten gains, while Pauline, his eldest daughter, who had kept his house since her mother's death, slaved from morning till night to make half-francs go as far as whole ones.

Pauline was not a handsome girl. She did not resemble her ill-looking, blear-eyed old father, but her life had been a hard one, and her good looks had been nipped in the bud by overwork, which is no beautifier of women. She was short and square-built, with irregular features and a pale face. She talked little, except to the children, and laughed still less. However, handsome is that handsome does, and as far as doing went, a better girl than Pauline Pochet never walked the earth. That is saying a good deal, but I mean it, and am prepared to stick by it. I do not know when I first began to find this out. If I try to recollect, the time seems to go further and further back, until it seems as if it had always been the wish of my heart to win her for my wife. But I said nothing to her or to any one of my growing love, for I knew that my parents would look sadly askance on the child of an evil-liver like Pochet for a daughter-in-law. Against her no one could breathe a word, but it would have seemed to my father and mother a shocking thing to enter into family ties with the landlord of the Café Pochet. So, though I made my visits as frequently as possible, I never hinted at the real object of them. No doubt the old man saw through it all, but he was cunning, and held his peace too.

At one time, even, he gave me a good deal of what I took to be encouragement; then suddenly he veered round and tried, as far as possible, to put obstacles in the way of my silent wooing.

I knew the reason of the change well

enough, for it took place just at the time when Léon Regnault began to be constantly in the bar of the Café Pochet.

Now Léon Regnault, the son of the Sugny inn-keeper, was a man far more like to take a girl's fancy than I was. He was a head taller than I, and far smarter-looking; and whereas I have always been one of the quiet sort, he had always a joke and a laugh ready. Moreover, his parents had saved money, and he would be one day the master of the inn, so that he was reckoned a capital match, and almost any father would have given him the encouragement he got from Pochet. To what Pauline thought I had no clue. As far as I could see, she treated Léon with the same reserve as she treated me; but then, of course, I did not see everything.

No doubt Léon's parents looked a good deal higher for a wife for their only son, but they had spoilt him from his cradle, and they had not the courage to go contrary to his wishes about Pauline.

"It's a sad pity," the père Regnault said once to my father, "a sad pity he's set his heart on the girl; but we must make the best of it, and anyhow, there will be the frontier between the girl and her father after the marriage."

"After the marriage!" I said, trying to look as if I was only interested for his sake. "You don't mean to say it's all settled?"

Regnault gave a knowing wink.

"Of course," he said. "Can you imagine old Pochet refusing such an offer?"

"And Pauline?" I said. Then I stopped, fearing I had betrayed myself.

But he was not thinking of me.

"Pauline!" he repeated. "Ah, well, she's as plain as she's poor, and she's not over-sharp, but she knows which side her bread is buttered."

By degrees the tale got about that, when old Pochet had found a suitable house-keeper, Léon Regnault would bring home his wife; yet, somehow, it always seemed to me as if the report was but the echo of his own fast and loose talking, and when I saw him look delighted at the chaff he got on the subject, and heard him hinting at the footing on which he and Pauline stood, I longed to hit him such a blow straight in his handsome face as should teach him to shield her name from gossip in the future. At last I made up my mind to try and find out from Pauline herself how the land really lay.

It was the end of September, and my tobacco crop was all cut and dried. This

gave me an excellent pretext for a visit to the Café Pochet, where I had not been for some time. When I reached the cross-road in the forest where the house stood, it was dusk. I walked in; the bar was empty. Pauline, in the kitchen, was getting the children's supper.

"Good evening, Pauline," I said.

"Good evening, Jules," she replied, going on with her work.

I sat down and tried to take the smallest child on my knee, but it screamed and struggled away.

"Silly little thing," said Pauline, as it ran and hid behind her, "that's how she is with strangers."

"Then she'll find it hard," I replied, "when a stranger takes your place."

"A stranger!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean? Who is to take my place?"

"Well," I said timidly, "I've heard you mean to leave home."

"And who have you heard that from?" she asked sharply.

"From Léon Regnault," I replied, "and by what he said it seemed he had the right to put the news about."

She was silent for a moment, then she said in her usual quiet way:

"He has no right to say any such thing. It is not true."

"I thought not," I replied. More than that I could not find courage to say; then, after a silence, I drew out my sample of tobacco. "I've brought this for your father," I began.

"Father's not here," she said. "I don't expect him to-night."

"Never mind," I went on, "you can tell him I've got about half a hundred-weight, and ask him to send over word about the price."

"No," she replied bluntly, "I won't. I'll have nothing to do with it."

"But, Pauline," I cried, "why ever not? I didn't mean to vex you. You see we've so often had disagreeables about prices, and it's best to make sure beforehand."

"I know all that," she replied. "That's not why I refuse. It's because I won't have anything to do with 'fraude.' I'm sick of it. Day after day, nothing but plotting, and bargaining, and squabbling, and cheating friend and foe, and then, when father is out, as he is to-night, getting a lot of contraband over—that is the worst of all. I am no coward, but oh, the horror of it—the long hours of waiting and listening for his signal, or for something worse, which must come some day!'

I had never heard Pauline make such a long speech before. My heart thrilled at the thought that she had spoken so freely, and with pity for the lonely watch she was about to keep. "Pauline," I said eagerly, "you need not watch alone; I will stay."

She shook her head. "No, thank you, Jules," she replied.

I did not venture to repeat the offer, for she had recovered her usual calm. Still I did not offer to go. She gave the children their meal. Presently she turned to me suddenly:

"Why do you mix yourself up with these dealings?" she asked.

"How could we all live," I asked in return, "if we did not follow the custom of Sugny?"

"And what about that great system of bee-keeping that some one told you about?" she said. "Weren't you going to make your fortune out of some grand patent hives? You talked a lot about it last year."

"I know I did; but I can't find time enough to attend to bee-keeping properly. Besides, it's a risky business."

"Not so risky as 'fraude'! Besides, it's a risk no honest man need be ashamed to run."

"But, Pauline," I pleaded, "I'm as honest as any man in Sugny."

"That's not saying much," she rejoined; "it's not the sort of recommendation I should expect in the man who comes courting me. Many a time, when I've sat watching for father, I've sworn to myself never to listen to a word of love from a man who's mixed up with smuggling."

Her words explained much that I had not before understood, though they sounded strange from the lips of Pochet's daughter. For a moment we looked into one another's eyes. Then I took my sample and returned it to my pocket. "I'll send it to Liège," I said.

"You'll do well," she rejoined simply.

Then I bade her good night, and walked home through the dark forest feeling as if the winning of Pauline had become quite a positive thing to me.

All the next day I went about in a kind of dream, my thoughts full of what had passed the night before. Why, I asked myself repeatedly, if Pauline had not some regard for me, had she spoken to me so frankly? Had she not as good as asked me to give up contraband dealing? If I gave it up for her sake, what then? I did

mean to give it up, and how should I prove my meaning to her? If it had not been the end of the summer, I should have straightway invested all my savings in bees and bee-hives; as it was, I could only make up my mind to do so the following spring. In the meantime I would read, and study, and learn all I could about apiculture. Before evening my hope had grown so big that I felt that I must see Pauline and get something to feed it on. The anxiety she had expressed about her father had seemed to me unfounded, still I made it the excuse to myself as I started once more across the forest, and as I went I thought of all I would say to her if by good luck I got the chance of a few minutes alone with her.

But when I reached the cross-roads I saw that something was amiss. A knot of men stood there talking eagerly, and some gendarmes were on guard at the ca' de door.

"Have you heard the news?" cried one of the men to me.

"What news?" I asked.

"About Pochet. He was trapped last night; some one turned informer. He made a grand fight, but none the less the sly old fox is landed in Sedan gaol."

I went on; at the door the patrol examined me before I was allowed to enter.

Pauline came forward at the sound of my step; the tears were rolling down her pale cheeks.

"Pauline," I said hesitatingly, "I'm glad I happened to come this evening. I have heard outside. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," she said hopelessly. "I can only sit still and wait for the worst."

"But," I began, "you must not lose courage; it is only his first conviction."

"That won't help him much," she replied. "You know that as well as I do."

"He was betrayed, I hear," I went on.

"Yes," she said; "a man of Châteliers, whom he had worsted in a bargain, turned informer. They seized him at this very door. I saw it all, heard it all. Ah, it was dreadful! Just what I have always feared," she shuddered at the remembrance; "and what will become of him? I have asked the gendarmes. They say he will get what he deserves. What will that be, do you think?"

I could not tell her. I knew nothing of

French law. I knew there were fines and imprisonments, but of the exact details nothing whatever.

"He resisted, you know," she went on, "he fought hard. Two excisemen were badly hurt."

Yes, it sounded bad; there seemed no chance of his being let off lightly.

But as I ransacked my mind for a grain of comfort, an idea struck me.

"Pauline," I cried, "we must have a good defence for him on his trial."

"We could not afford it," she said sadly.

"But," I continued, "I'm thinking of Maitre Letellier."

"Maitre Letellier!" she repeated; "who is he?"

"He is the most eloquent pleader in Sedan," I explained, "and I have heard that he often pleads for nothing. He is a great Socialist, you know. He tried to get into the Chamber last year, and failed. Since then he loses no chance of airing his opinions. The president of the tribunal at Sedan admires him too. He is the very man to take up your father's cause, and he'll do it for nothing as it's against the Government."

Pauline started from her seat.

"Jules," she cried, "is that true?"

"Yes," I said, "I've heard it a dozen times."

"And will you go to Maitre Letellier and ask him?"

"Yes," I replied, "I will go now."

"And when will you let me know?"

"On my way back," I said, "but it will be late. Remember, it is an hour's walk to Sedan."

"Never mind, I shall be watching for you. Ah, Jules, I am very grateful to you."

It was wonderful how light my heart was as I started on Pauline's errand. The ground seemed to fly under my feet. Within an hour I was waiting in Maitre Letellier's bureau for him to return from the club where he was dining. When at last he came, he did not let me tell my story near so fully as I wished to.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I know the kind of case. It is scarcely such as I care to undertake. Still, as you are so urgent, I might, perhaps. You had better come and see me to-morrow at ten o'clock. I do not talk business out of business hours." Then he rose; our interview was evidently at an end. "One word more," he said, as I bade him good evening. "Am I to understand

that it is you who retain me for the defence?"

I stared at him in astonishment.

"I mean," he continued, "is it you who are making yourself responsible for my fee?"

At this question you might have knocked me down with a feather.

"Your fee, Monsieur l'Avocat!" I gasped.

He smiled.

"Yes, my fee," he said; "did you think prisoners were defended gratis?"

"But I had heard—" I began, then suddenly I seemed to recognise how vague those stories of his disinterestedness had been; besides, no doubt he did not class smuggling as a political offence. I changed my tone. "Yes, monsieur, certainly I am responsible for the fee."

"I shall not be hard on you," he said; "we will make it two hundred and fifty francs."

"Bien, Monsieur l'Avocat," I replied, and then, half dazed, I walked out into the street.

Two hundred and fifty francs! Where was that to come from? My savings amounted to one-third of the sum. The trial would come off soon, perhaps, and Pauline would have to be disappointed.

I was outside the fortifications by this time. I saw in the twilight the outline of an estaminet which I knew of old. I went in and called for a "petit verre," then for another. While I drank, the landlord sat and talked with me. When I came out my mind was so full of doubt and perplexity that I could not walk quickly. It was past ten o'clock when I knocked at the door of the Café Pochet.

"It's all right, Pauline," I said; "Maitre Letellier undertakes the case."

She began to ask questions, but I hurried away, and she called out her thanks after me into the night.

steadily to and fro, clutched at the bushes to save himself, then slipped, limp and helpless, to the ground.

"I've had an—accident," he murmured. "If you could help me—" He shut his eyes, leaning back heavily against the bushes.

Miss Hope Brown was almost terrified out of her senses. She thought for a moment that the man was dead; he looked so horribly still and ghastly in the moonlight.

Resisting another violent impulse to fly, she ran up to him and knelt down by his side.

"Oh, dear! What is to be done?" she cried involuntarily. She was vaguely conscious, in her distress and fear, that all girls would be expected to know exactly how to behave in such an emergency, and miserably sensible of her own ignorance and incapacity.

The little desperate cry perhaps reached him, for he opened his eyes and gazed straight into hers as she bent towards him.

She drew hastily back, flushing she scarcely knew why, unless it was that the man's eyes were so dark and so beautiful.

"Are you much hurt?" she exclaimed helplessly.

"Rather," he said. Then he raised himself. "Curse them!" he said, his eyes burning.

She shrank farther away, suddenly becoming conscious again of the fact that she was probably in the presence of one of those dreadful creatures—a poacher; also that she was giving him her assistance. But the man's white, blood-stained face confused her as to the simple ethics of the game-laws.

"I am so sorry," she exclaimed involuntarily, as he turned his head to look at her. The lurid burning of hate and anger in his eyes had softened suddenly into something more calculated to arouse a woman's pity.

"I'm bleeding to death, I think. No," as she said something about getting help, "don't call any one—" The faintness overcame him again.

As he drooped heavily towards her, she stretched out her arm and drew his head against her shoulder.

"I can't stir a step farther," he gasped, looking up into her eyes with fierce entreaty. "I'll have to call them. But you look good. I saw you before—to-night—up at the house. Go and tell Mrs. Page.

"OUTLAWED."

A SHORT SERIAL.

CHAPTER III.

THE wounded man, his breath coming in laboured, painful gasps, after that terrible run for his life, stared blankly at Hope. Then something like the ghost of a recognising smile crossed his lips. He even made a movement to raise his cap, but his hand dropped, he swayed un-

No one else—promise me!" straightening himself and seizing her hand. "Swear it. You look as if a man might trust you."

"I will tell Mrs. Page, and no one else," she said gently. "But you can't stay here alone," hastily, yet feeling how little use she could be to him. She could not have supported him many more minutes.

"If they find me here I can't help it. If they don't, and Mrs. Page comes in time, I'll pull through this too." And again the ghost of a smile crossed his white lips.

"She will be here in time," she said simply.

Since the moment she had drawn his head to her shoulder she had felt a kind of personal possession in the life she was assisting to save.

She ran off, never slackening her steps till she saw the lights of the house gleaming between the trees.

Then she stopped to collect her thoughts. The man plainly had his own reasons for not being seen by any one but Mrs. Page. By this time she had come to the conclusion that it was no ordinary poacher who was in so evil a strait. His voice, his appearance, in spite of the rough disguise of the working-man's clothes, had betrayed him. She wondered why he had sent her to Mrs. Page.

She divined that most of the servants would be in the front of the house in the supper and refreshment rooms, or looking on at the dancing from the gallery.

There was a side door leading into a wing that had not been thrown open to-night. One set of rooms in it was set apart for Gilbert Egerton's use. Another set was always kept locked.

Hope, thinking of the side entrance, hurried cautiously round to it, avoiding the light flung on to the terrace and drive in the front of the house from the brilliantly illuminated windows.

She heard the sounds of waltz music as they floated out from the house, the voices and laughter of some of the guests as they wandered up and down the terrace outside.

It was all in such strange contrast to the scene from which she had come that it impressed itself on her memory to the end of her life. She shivered a little under the excitement. Though she did not know it, from that moment she passed from the careless, unthinking ignorance of girlhood into the fuller knowledge of the

woman, and she felt the tears that haunt even the merriest of human laughter. Not that she was conscious of moralising. Her chief thought was to find Mrs. Page. Only afterwards she remembered that strange chill depression which touched her as she brought the message of the wounded man into the house. She entered by the side door, which luckily had not been closed, and found herself inside a long and rather narrow passage.

As she stood hesitating, the door of a room, used by Gilbert Egerton as his study, opened suddenly, and the very person she wanted came out—Mrs. Page, the housekeeper at Meadowlands.

As the woman's eyes fell on her she turned as white as a sheet.

"Good heart alive, miss!" she gasped, hurrying up to her; "whatever is the matter?"

Hope glanced down instinctively as the woman pointed at her, and a shuddering exclamation broke from her too.

Her ball-dress, her gloves were stained with the wounded man's blood. In her excitement she had not noticed it.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "there is a poor man who has been dreadfully hurt. He is by the old summer-house, in the wilderness. He's bleeding to death, I am afraid, and he asked me to come for you."

"For me!" The startled alarm on the housekeeper's face was indescribable. "Good Heaven!" under her breath. "It wouldn't be—What is he like, miss?"

"Oh, he isn't a poacher, I'm sure—not a common one, at any rate. He has dark eyes—"

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed the good lady again. "Lord!" to herself, "it's him, sure enough, or she wouldn't have mentioned his eyes first thing."

The girl was beginning to notice the dismay and amazement her tale had roused. There was something more in it than the mere shocked surprise of an ugly accident.

"What is it?" she asked breathlessly. "He said I was not to tell any one but you. Oh! if you know him, make haste; he may be dying. Ah!"

She drew back a step, frightened and conscience-stricken.

She had not noticed that the housekeeper had left the door of the room ajar. It now opened wide, and Gilbert Egerton stepped out into the passage. He must have heard everything. She had never

dreamed for an instant that he would have been in this deserted part of the house at this hour instead of being in the ball-room.

"Will you tell me, Miss Brown, how you—met this man?" he asked in a stern voice, which she scarcely recognised.

His face was white and set. Even in her dismay she was conscious of the indescribable change which had transformed the dandy she had despised an hour ago into this merciless-eyed young man.

"I had walked as far as the old summer-house. Mrs. Page," turning instinctively to her from the cruel setness of that look in the young man's face, "you will go?" And overstrung and exhausted with her long run, the pleading tears sprang into her eyes.

"Of course I will," said Mrs. Page. "There!" she said afterwards to her mistress. "If I hadn't have gone for his sake I would have gone for hers. She looked sweet enough to be his guardian angel pleading for him." Mrs. Page was romantic, but her romance sprang from the most womanly and tender of hearts. "I'll get some brandy, Mr. Gilbert—"

But her young master was already on his way to the door.

"No! He mustn't go! He looks so dreadfully angry!" exclaimed Hope. "It may have been wrong; but I promised—"

"It's all right, deary," said the housekeeper in motherly soothing, though there was something anxious and troubled in her own face as she glanced after Gilbert Egerton as he left the house. "He can be trusted, though—" She stopped short. "Now, miss," she said, coaxingly, "will you do something else for the poor young gentleman hurt down there? You've done more than you know as it is, and they'll never be able to thank you enough. Just slip away to your room without any one seeing you, and for Heaven's sake, miss, don't tell any one what has happened. There, miss," pushing her gently down the corridor, "for the Lord's sake go, and let me get away too, to see."

It seemed as if she, too, felt that it was best not to let Gilbert Egerton meet the helpless man alone.

Impressed by her entreating earnestness, Hope obeyed, and succeeded in reaching her room unseen.

"Who can it be?" she exclaimed to herself. "I have never seen eyes like that

before. Oh, how silly I am! Poor Mrs. Egerton!"

And she sank down into one of the chairs, appalled at the magnitude of the sorrow which seemed suddenly to darken over the life of the woman who had been so good to her.

The recollection of an outcast first-born son—the idol of his mother's heart—came back to her. Was this, then, Wilfred Egerton? The man against whom every hand was raised? The son who had been forbidden his father's house? The fugitive from justice, upon whom rested so black a suspicion?

CHAPTER IV.

TOWARDS the close of the ball a rumour spread through the room that there had been a serious poaching affray, and that the head gamekeeper and one of the poachers had been badly wounded. The poacher, however, had so far made good his escape. Gilbert Egerton's absence, which had been noticed, was explained by the fact that he had been called away to see into the matter. Neither his father nor mother knew that the affray had been so serious till he returned to the ball-room about two o'clock. He had given orders, on leaving the house, that nothing was to be said to them about it.

Hope, who had changed her dress and returned to the ball-room, happened to be standing talking to Mr. Egerton when Mr. Gilbert Egerton, a little pale perhaps, but languid and self-complacent as usual, sauntered into the room. He gave his father a short account of the skirmish, and the search that had followed.

"And to think that they've let that scoundrel Molloy slip through their fingers again!" said his father angrily. "If poor Eason dies, he shall be hanged, if I hunt him down myself."

"Yes," said his son laconically, twirling out the points of his moustache.

But Hope, glancing nervously at him, caught his eyes, and she was again frightened by their cruel sternness. A thought flashed into her brain from the ugliness of which her charity recoiled, yet it clung to her for the rest of the evening.

The man who would alone benefit by Wilfred Egerton's disgrace and death was Gilbert—the second son.

"I wish you had let me know, Gilbert," said his father, testily. "I know those scoundrels' ways better than you. What time did you get the message?"

"I didn't think there was any need of disturbing you, sir," said the young man quietly. "It was just upon one, I think, when Ford got here."

His father, inveighing bitterly against the iniquities of the scoundrels who defied the divine rights of land-owners and game-preservers, went off to talk the matter over with a fellow-magistrate.

Hope's face had paled as there fell on her the full sense of the tragedy underlying the indignation of the unconscious upholder of the game laws, thinking only of his wounded gamekeeper and the escape of the snarer of his pheasants—throbbing through the flowers, and lights, and music of the ball-room scene about her—dogging the steps of the handsome, stately woman moving at that moment towards them, the smile with which she had been talking to one of her guests still lingering on her beautiful mouth. She turned restlessly to the young man standing by her side, still toying with the moustache of which he was so vain. She wanted to ask if that other man were safe. But the memory of the look she had surprised in his eyes when his father, in his terrible unconsciousness, had threatened to hunt down and hang the murderer, should Eason die, checked her.

"I hate the game-laws!" she said instead.

"Do you?" He turned and looked at her with an appearance of mild astonishment. "Do not let my father, or any man above middle-age here, hear you. They look upon them as the chief factor in the country salvation. Only the constitutional mind is capable of preserving pheasants."

He would still speak frivolously.

She turned away from him towards the unconscious woman coming towards them in stately ease.

Perhaps he even found the meeting with his mother a little too trying for his callous self-control. He had followed her glance.

"I suppose I ought to go and make peace with my partners," he said coolly. "Here is one of yours coming to look for you, I think," moving away as another young man came eagerly up to her.

She was very glad to be carried off before Mrs. Egerton reached her.

That gracious lady gave her a kindly little smile as she was whirled past her into the dance. She was delighted at the girl's success.

Hope was not able to answer immediately an amusing remark made to her at

that moment by her partner, for something seemed to rise in her throat and choke the laughing reply. It suddenly struck her how very sad Mrs. Egerton's mouth always was beneath its smiles.

The ball came to an end, and Hope was actually glad when the night's pleasure was over.

The guests had all driven away, the last of the visitors forming the house-party had retired to his or her room, and sleep and silence reigned through the house. But Gilbert Egerton still sat up waiting. It was nearly five. Outside it was already light, and the sun's rays were growing hot enough to drink up the dew on flower-beds and lawns. Not a leaf stirred. There was only the twitter of the birds as they rejoiced in the sunshine of the new day.

Gilbert Egerton, coming into the smoking-room, in which lingered the fumes of the late cigars, flung open the shutters and windows to let in the sweet air. He was still wearing the smoking jacket he had donned last night to join the other men in the smoking-room. His face was pale and haggard, full of a fierce disgust. He dropped down on the window-sill, leaning heavily against the framework. Something faint, sickly-sweet, oppressed him, tainting even, it seemed to him, the fresh sweetness of the summer morning.

He glanced down at the floor of the room; a buttonhole of stephanotis, dropped by one of the men the previous night, bruised and yellow, lay there. He picked it up with an expression of loathing, and flung it far out of the window.

It had been a favourite buttonhole of his outcast brother.

He sat there, his hands thrust in his pockets, staring out before him.

There was a beautiful bit of flower-gardening to be seen from the window. The grounds of Meadowlands were celebrated in the county. This morning, in the early summer hours, the sweep of velvet turf, the magnificent old trees, the cunning masses of flower colour, made a picture beautiful enough to tempt the soul of a better man than Gilbert Egerton. But the property was strictly entailed on the eldest son.

Gilbert Egerton was thinking of that eldest son now.

Then suddenly the early summer-morning stillness was broken. The young man started, his face paling in the shock of the moment with a different feeling. He leant forward to listen.

The sound grew more distinct.

It was that of distant but rapidly approaching wheels. It was an ordinary enough sound, but to him it bore a sinister meaning. He started to his feet, noiselessly and quickly closed the window and shutters, and left the smoking-room.

CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE later, before even the servants were yet stirring, sleeping late after the ball of the previous evening, four men noiselessly took up their positions about the house in a manner to guard and over-look every possible mode of egress.

When everything was arranged to his full satisfaction the chief of the party rang at the hall-door.

He could hear the bells clanging through the sleeping stillness of the great house, and cool-headed and accustomed to such work as he was, the man did not half like the sound himself.

He had a very unpleasant task before him. But it all came in the course of a day's duty, and besides that, he was young and ambitious, and this particular duty successfully carried out would mean personal advantage and promotion.

There was a pause as the echoes of the bell died away. Some of the servants, awakened out of their sleep, began hastily to dress themselves. But before the young man could ring again the hall-door was unbarred and Gilbert Egerton, apparently on his way for a swim in the river, appeared.

"Dornton!" he exclaimed. For a moment, as he looked straight into the other man's eyes, it seemed as if his first impulse was to bar the entrance to him.

"It's for that," said the detective quietly. "The house is watched on all sides. I know he is here. I must see Mr. Egerton. I promise you this, that anything I can do to spare the family I will."

A slight but inexpressibly bitter smile crossed the young guardsman's pale lips.

The other man glanced away for a second.

"I will go and tell my father," said Gilbert Egerton, drawing back into the hall. It was a tacit admission that opposition was powerless, and the detective, with a warrant for the arrest of Wilfred Egerton, the heir to one of the oldest and wealthiest estates in the county, crossed the threshold of his father's house.

"I'm not sure that I should have had the pluck to do it," thought the detective, who knew how, till this man had disgraced it,

the honour of the family had been stainless. "Only I'm certain he's here. If only that maunding idiot hadn't disobeyed orders and let him slip, we should have nailed him by this."

It was a relief to his feelings to be able to vent his wrath on his subordinate, who, through an unpardonable act of disobedience and folly, had lost the track of the fugitive. Besides, the possibility of his being wrong after his present high-handed proceeding was anything but pleasant to face. His chiefs would not forgive such a blunder.

"But he is here," said Dornton again, proceeding to mount the broad staircase after Gilbert Egerton. He ought to have followed him at once. But he had intentionally spared the father and son. Besides, he knew the stuff of which the father was made. Curiously enough, he suddenly found himself no longer so sure of the son.

"A year ago he would have given him up as uncompromisingly as Mr. Egerton himself," he thought, regretting bitterly the momentary impulse of mercy. "But there's a difference in him. He was hardly surprised, I think."

But as he hurried across the gallery at the head of the staircase in the direction that Gilbert Egerton had taken, he saw father and son coming out of one of the rooms. Mr. Egerton's face was flushed red with anger. His eyes blazed.

"What do you mean?" he asked, his voice hoarse with indignation, "by coming to search for—that man here? He would not dare take shelter here. He knows that I would hand him straight over to the police, though he is my own flesh and blood."

"Oh, father!"

They all turned to the doorway. Mrs. Egerton had flung on a dressing-gown, and stood there, her white feet bare, her hair—which had turned gray so long before its time—tumbling in rough confusion about her. But she was unconscious of everything but the terrible news which had burst so suddenly upon her.

Her husband's lip twitched, as if that agonised appeal to his fatherhood had touched him. But with a stern gesture he motioned her away.

"Take your mother into her room," he said harshly to his son.

The young man sprang forward, only just in time, for his mother swayed to and fro, and fell heavily into his arms. He lifted her tenderly back into the room.

"My God!" muttered Mr. Egerton, "it will kill her!"

But he turned back to the detective, who, with impassive face, looked on silently at the domestic tragedy. Perhaps his calm stillness braced up the shaken nerves of Mr. Egerton.

"You can search the house from attic to cellar," he said, with bitter harshness. "That scoundrel is not here!" He heard the servants moving in the hall below. "You can give your orders; I will see they are obeyed. I will only ask you to spare—his mother as much as you can."

"Thank you, sir."

It was perhaps a hardly necessary courtesy; but it was Dornton's homage to the honour and integrity of the man whose life was in no way blackened by the sins and dishonour of his son.

"There was a poaching affair last night," he said, after a few questions, which Mr. Egerton answered with a simple directness the truth of which could not be doubted for a moment.

"Yes." He turned livid as a thought struck him. "Gilbert!" as that young man came out at the same moment from his mother's room.

"Eason swears it was Ned Molloy," Gilbert spoke quietly. "He could not be mistaken. He knows him too well."

"Thank Heaven!" said his father, the horror lifting from his face. "You wouldn't deceive me, I know, Gilbert. Go and see what you can do for Dornton. If I am not wanted, I will go back to your mother."

But it struck the keen eyes of the detective as they moved away that the quietness of the young man's face was that of intense self-repression.

He was certain now that he would get no assistance from him.

Before another hour had gone by, every soul in the house, from guest to servant, knew that Meadowlands was under the supervision of the police, and that the place was being searched for Wilfred Egerton, whose name three months ago had been in every one's mouth as that of a possible thief and murderer. Opinions were divided on the matter. While some believed with the broken-hearted mother in his innocence, the greater part shared his father's belief in his guilt.

As soon as they could arrange for their departure, the guests, full of pity for their unfortunate host and hostess, left the house. By luncheon-time only Hope

remained. Mr. Egerton, thinking her presence might comfort his wife a little, had asked her to stay. She was only too glad to do what she could to help them. She had done her best to replace Mrs. Egerton, who had been unable to leave her room or see any one; looking after the departing guests, directing as well as she could the servants, most of whom, after their kind, had completely lost their heads. It was a dreadful morning. The very atmosphere seemed charged with the intense excitement of the curiosity and fear that prevailed.

But it wore slowly away, and not a sign did the police discover of Wilfred Egerton's hiding-place.

The house had been searched from attic to basement. Not a corner had been overlooked. The secret staircase, and chamber called the "Priest's Room," had been shown to the police by Mr. Egerton himself. The servants had been skilfully questioned, but their complete ignorance on the matter was apparent enough to the astute detective.

Outside in the grounds the watch and search had been as careful and as futile.

Hope came across the detective once or twice in the course of the morning. It seemed to her that he was everywhere. She wondered how Mr. Egerton could endure his presence in the house; why he did not order him off the premises. She was terrified at and hated him, with righteous anger and contempt. To her he represented the embodiment of ruthless, stealthy cunning and spying. She was intensely thankful that he asked her no questions. She was longing to hear what had been the end of that scene, in which she had played so slight a part the previous night. But she had not dared ask questions, and once when she felt those quiet, unfathomable eyes of the young detective resting on her face, she was thankful that she knew no more than she did.

Happily for them all, her own maid had had to go away the previous evening, called home by a sudden case of illness in her family. She had left Meadowlands after helping her mistress to dress for the ball, and so as yet no one had seen or heard anything of the blood-stained ball-dress. It would have been impossible to have hidden it from her maid—and then who knows whether she could have kept the secret, and what suspicions it might have raised in the detective's mind? She

trusted that none of the servants had noticed her change of dress in the evening, or that no one would chance to mention it.

"Oh, I'm so glad they have all gone!" she exclaimed, as she and Gilbert Egerton turned back into the house after seeing the last of the guests drive off.

"It is very kind of you to take so much interest in our affairs!" he said languidly.

The young man had irritated her more and more as the morning wore on. He had shown such a complete lack of appreciation of the dread and disgrace of the situation.

The slight smile on his face goaded her now past endurance.

By it she discovered that the daughter of the "oil and colourman" had been identifying herself with his family. At least, so she read the smile. Her face flamed. She could have bitten her tongue through for the luckless exclamation.

"I'm glad, too!" he went on. "It's an awful bore to have the house crammed with people you don't care about?"

"Isn't that rather ungracious, considering that they were invited here for your special benefit?" she said, the greatest disdain in the uplifting of her pretty head.

He looked at her mildly, as if he had no belief in the wish of any one to treat him with scorn.

"I'm not sure that they were invited here only for my benefit," he said. "My mother, you see, had a lot of dinners and parties to return, and I am sure she did it as much for you as for me. I'm quite willing to share the honours with you, if you will let me," indolently.

Hope had heard how sternly and persistently for years Mr. Egerton had ignored his eldest son's existence. He had lived and acted and forced his wife to do the same, as if he had never belonged to him. Even since the last disgraceful affair in which he had been mixed up his father had continued his usual course of action, and they had given the ball last night in honour of this, their other son, as though their first-born were not living, an outcast from society.

It was unjust. But she mentally accused Gilbert Egerton of being the chief cause of the apparent heartlessness.

"If I had been you I would have done all in the world not to have had that ball last night!" she flashed out at him. "I don't know how you could do it."

He opened his blue-grey eyes in real or affected amazement.

"I really see no reason," he began, then broke off abruptly.

Mrs. Page was coming across the hall to them; she had been with her mistress nearly all the morning. Hope had not seen Mrs. Egerton yet, and she hurried forward to enquire.

"If you please, miss, Mrs. Egerton is feeling a little better," said Mrs. Page, "and would you go and see her after luncheon?"

"I shall be very glad," began Hope eagerly, and then turned quickly round.

A faint exclamation, which she could hardly credit, seemed to have broken from the indolent dandy's lips. But he had turned on his heel and was walking away.

"I shall be only too pleased to come!" she said. "Please give her my dearest love, and tell her so!"

But Mrs. Page shook her head, too, a little as she went back to give the message to her mistress.

"The Lord grant no mischief will come of it! But he is very hard on his brother, is Mr. Gilbert, and she thinks nothing but of Mr. Wilfred!"

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